
● Appendix: Characteristics of Effective Correctional Treatment

Research has identified 10 characteristics that are associated with treatment effectiveness.

1 The level of service is matched to the level of risk, need and individual learning factors (Risk, Need and Responsivity).

Risk = The level at which the offender is likely to reoffend.

High-risk offenders have the most to gain from treatment because they have the most room for improvement. On the other hand, low risk offenders require minimal, or no intervention. Treatment is most effective when it is matched to the level of offender risk. In fact, evidence suggests that intensive levels of services with low risk offenders are ineffective and may even increase recidivism.

Need = Factors that are linked to criminal behavior, and when changed through treatment, will reduce recidivism.

Examples of dynamic factors that contribute to criminal behavior are substance abuse, cognitive deficits, anti-social attitudes, lack of employment stability, weak marital and family relationships. Individuals may have a high degree of need in these areas, while others may require lesser help in these areas. As with the risk principle, treatment is most effective when it is matched to the offender's level of need.

Responsivity = Individual factors to be considered in order for the offender to benefit most from treatment.

For example, a person's level of motivation, his individual learning style and level of cognitive functioning are factors that will influence his level of acceptance for treatment as well as his learning and retention within treatment.

It is interesting to note that offender risk and need are highly correlated with substance abusers. In other words, the higher the need (substance abuse problem) the higher their risk is to re-offend. Therefore, addressing an offender's substance abuse problem (need) will reduce his behavior that causes crime (risk). Treatment that is matched to the offender in each of these three dimensions (risk, need and responsivity) is most helpful for the individual, most efficient and best reduce recidivism.

2 Criminogenic needs (the factors that contribute to the commission of crime) are specifically addressed in treatment.

There are two categories of dynamic need: criminogenic and non-criminogenic need.

Criminogenic factors are those that contribute to a person committing crime, and therefore when changed will reduce recidivism. Examples of dynamic factors that contribute to criminal behavior are substance abuse, cognitive deficits, anti-social attitudes, criminal companions, lack of employment stability, weak marital and family relationships. Treatment that directly targets criminogenic needs is most effective in reducing recidivism.

On the other hand, non-criminogenic needs are those that when altered, are not associated with changes in criminal behavior. Examples include self-esteem, anxiety, feelings of alienation, psychological discomfort, group cohesion and neighborhood improvement.

3 Treatment is consistent with the offender's learning style and personality. For example, concrete thinkers benefit from highly structured programs.

This is a further extrapolation of the responsivity principle. Treatment programs will be more effective if their instruction is tailored to the learning needs of the individual. For example, offenders with learning impairments will require different teaching styles than offenders who have a high level of cognitive functioning.

The delivery of the treatment should recognize that different people respond to different teaching techniques. The use of a variety of teaching techniques, such as group discussion, role-plays, introspective exercises, case studies, lecturettes overheads, handouts, and small group exercises will all cater to the various learning styles within the group. The use of varied instructional techniques also enhances the participants' level of interest in learning the material.

Many offenders view their world in quite 'black or white' terms, and therefore, respond best to concrete, hands-on, relevant and practical instruction. Research has found that offenders respond best to structured cognitive-behavioral techniques with an emphasis on the development of pro-social skills.

4 Treatment is based on cognitive-behavioral techniques.

Cognitive therapy is based on the idea that how a person reacts to an event is directly dependent upon his thoughts and attitudes about the event, not the event itself. In other words, different people will react differently to the same event depending on how they interpret what has happened and how that interpretation relates to their personal beliefs. Therefore, to alter one's behavior it is imperative to alter his thoughts and emotions. Cognitive intervention approaches include problem solving, relaxation therapy, modeling strategies, restructuring of cognitive distortions, challenging maladaptive assumptions and identifying and challenging automatic thoughts.

Behavioral therapy is focused on how people can change their behavior by learning new, more desirable behavior. Some commonly used behavior therapy

techniques are social skills training, contingency management, modeling, relaxation, self-management methods and behavioral rehearsal.

Each person is a complex creature. Tapping into both how he can think and what he can do to effectively cope with a high-risk situation is consistent with his natural interactions between his thoughts and behavior. Also, by combining thinking and action strategies to cope with a situation provides the person with an infinite number of choices, and therefore, increases his level of efficacy.

5 Treatment is delivered by therapists who are interpersonally sensitive, appropriately supervised and knowledgeable of the psychology of criminal conduct.

A program is only as effective as its delivery — a program's effectiveness is highly reliant upon the characteristics and skills of the people who are delivering the treatment.

Closely related to the responsivity principle, how a participant views the program is highly dependent upon the relationship he develops with the treatment provider. For example, the participant's level of motivation, engagement and personal investment in the material will be greatly increased if he views his treatment provider as being attentive, credible, non-judgmental, sincere and willing to listen. Therefore, it is critical that treatment providers embody personal characteristics and social skills that will build a positive, yet professional, rapport with the participants.

On top of the personal characteristics, the participants will best respond to a treatment provider who is able to provide the instruction in a credible and effective manner. For example, the participants will buy into the treatment better if the instructor seems to know what she is talking about, can answer the participant questions well and is able to convey the material in a way that is highly interesting and easy for them to understand. Therefore, an instructor's instructional skills and knowledge of their material is critical for the program to be effective. This requires effective on-going training, supervision and support.

6 Treatment is delivered with integrity — the actual delivery must conform to the program principles and it must be based on a conceptual model of criminal behavior.

The actual design of the program will make or break its success. The more a program embodies the characteristics that research has shown to be effective, the more likely it will be effective. Rather than a 'one size fits all', 'kitchen sink' approach, the program has to be clear in what it is targeting to change and utilize only those techniques that will reduce recidivism. Each learning objective, each exercise and each lesson plan has to be designed with specific purpose. The program has to flow well and link, build and reinforce from one point to the next.

Once designed, the program has to be administered and managed in ways that will allow each carefully designed objective to unfold according to its intended design.

7 Programs are delivered with integrity in a structured, manualized format.

Effective programs are delivered exactly according to their design. Program integrity is one of the most important ingredients to ensure a program's overall effectiveness. Similar to following a cooking recipe, each step, each ingredient, each measure has been carefully outlined in order to achieve a specific objective. Deviations from the recipe will simply not result in the intended outcome.

The best way to ensure each program is delivered according to its design, and ultimately achieve each specific outcome, is to offer the program in a highly structured format. The use of structured manuals offer many advantages for the treatment providers as they reduce anxiety and preparation time and make it easier for them to deliver the program properly. Structured manuals provide program managers with increased staffing flexibility, reduced training requirements, and ease with on going program supervision. Well-designed structured manuals provide the participants with interactive, relevant and interesting instruction regardless of who is delivering the program.

Having the same well-designed program delivered in the same manner no matter where, when, or from whom best ensures the offenders are all receiving the program according to its design, which ultimately translates into increased effectiveness. Consistent delivery also contributes to more robust decisions regarding potential program revisions as well as its overall effectiveness.

8 Relapse prevention is offered in the community with seamless transition from institution to community.

On-going reinforcement and day to day application of what they learned in their initial program is one of the best ways to help people maintain their new behavior. This is perhaps even more important for offenders, as they are not only attempting to practice new thinking and behavior, but are having to adjust to the challenges of community life at the same time. This is no doubt one of the reasons why research has shown that having appropriate after care in place for offenders is essential for increasing their success.

9 Programs include a well-designed evaluation framework.

An important question that should be asked is whether the program is effective or not. The answer to this question will help make important decisions regarding the program. For example, a program that can prove its effectiveness will build a stronger case for further funding than a program that cannot demonstrate its

effectiveness. Well-designed methodologies also contribute to understanding the program's specific strengths and weaknesses, which can then be used to improve the program. In addition, a program that can prove its effectiveness gathers a feeling of credibility and respect, which often translates to an air of confidence and stability which is picked up by the treatment providers and the participants — people want to be associated with success. On the other hand, if a program has proven to be ineffective, precious programming resources can be better spent elsewhere.

The best research framework is incorporated into the program's design itself. This way the needs of research and program delivery are complimentary to each other.

10 Programs are based on methods supported by controlled outcome research.

There are an infinite number of possible topics to choose from when designing a treatment program for offenders. What works best, and for whom? Can one assume that the best techniques to use are those that are most popular? Effective programs utilize only those techniques that are supported by outcome research. The following are the methods that are currently best supported through research in being most effective for substance abusers:

- Aftercare Procedures
- Behavioral Marital Therapy
- Community Reinforcement Techniques
- Employment Skills
- Goal Setting in Treatment
- High Risk Identification Skills
- Motivational Enhancement Techniques
- Problem Solving
- Social Skills
- Stress Management Training
- Structured Relapse Prevention

Suggested Readings

Andrews, D.A., and Bonta, J. (1998). *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*. Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing Co.

Andrews, D.A., Bonta, J., and Hoge, R.D. (1990). Classification for Effective Rehabilitation: Rediscovering Psychology. *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 17, 19-52.